

# JERUSALEM LETTER

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

JL:111 6 Shevat 5750 / 1 February 1990

## ISRAELIS ABROAD - DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

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**New Patterns of Residence and Mobility Confound the Statistics / How Many Have Left and How Do We Know? / Have the Number of Yordim Increased? / Why Do People Leave?**

What is the truth about the number of yordim (emigrants from Israel)? Since the Yom Kippur War, one of the most popular issues used to scare the Israeli public is that of the great increase in the number of yordim. (Since ancient times pilgrims "going up" to Israel have been known as olim, and with this definition, modern Hebrew interprets those emigrating as yordim, those "going down.") Figures have been bandied about that have led wags to revive the old joke that the last one leaving Ben-Gurion Airport should turn off the lights.

No observer of the Israeli scene can doubt that there is a problem of yerida (emigration), especially in the way of a brain drain of many of Israel's younger scientists, academics, and professionals. On the other hand, in order to confront the problem properly we must confront it as it is, neither underestimating it nor exaggerating it.

### **New Patterns of Residence and Mobility Confound the Statistics**

As all those who have tried to explore the matter have discovered, figures about yerida are hard to come by. There is no foolproof way to know how many Israelis have actually left Israel permanently from the statistical data at hand. Even under the best of circumstances, many Israelis who leave Israel view their absence as only temporary, even if it is long-term. In addition, many of those who seek advanced education outside of Israel fully intend to return all the while. Many, probably most, do return, even if they are absent from the country for five to ten years for legitimate reasons. They could very well be counted in the statistics as yordim.

The matter is further complicated by the transformation in residence and mobility patterns in the world. When the concepts of aliya and yerida were

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher; David Clayman and Zvi R. Marom, Associate Editors.  
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developed, travel was slow and mobility difficult. One either lived in one's place or one did not. Increasingly in the post-modern world, these do not have to be either/or choices. In other words, increasing numbers of people can and do divide their time among different residences, internationally as well as within their native lands. Certainly among Israelis who are recorded as yordim in some of the estimates, there are those who, while spending most of their time outside of the country, return every few months and punctiliously return to do their military reserve duty. Are these people considered to be yordim or not?

Given all these confusions, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs has made an effort to determine just how many yordim there have been and whether yerida has increased in the past few years. What we offer here are the best estimates available at this time, understanding the limits of the data.

#### How Many Have Left and How Do We Know?

According to the available figures during the past few years the number of Israelis leaving Israel permanently seems to have remained quite stable, contrary to headlines which indicate a rise in yerida as opposed to aliya (immigration).

It is true that the actual number of yordim has increased, however the rate of yerida (the number of yordim compared to the total population) was more acute in the 1950s and 1960s. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the rate of yerida during this time period was approximately .4 percent (that is, 4 out of 1,000), and is attributed to the fact that with every surge of aliya there is a surge in yerida. Between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, the rate significantly dropped to approximately .1 percent. In the two years following the 1973 war, the rate climbed to .45-.5 percent, and then from 1975 to the present it has stabilized at .25-.3 percent.(1)

The determination of whom exactly is

considered a yored is in itself a major problem. Unless he or she declares his other intentions, it is impossible to know if an Israeli citizen abroad is planning to return or not. In an interview with Shmuel Lahis, former Director-General of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency, who has taken upon himself activity to return yordim to Israel, he defined a yored as a person who goes abroad for at least two years and changes the status or purpose of his trip in the direction of settling abroad. For example, if one leaves as a tourist and after two years begins to work, he is considered a yored.(2) Deputy Agriculture Minister Avraham Katz-Oz states that an Israeli who has been out of the country for at least seven years is an official yored.(3)

To date, there is no agreed-upon definition. Does one automatically become a yored after seven years, or is it just two? Does one define a yored by his intentions of staying abroad or by the actual number of years he has been away from Israel?

Due to the lack of solid data, varying opinions have been expressed as to the number of Israelis actually living abroad. The Central Bureau of Statistics claims that the total number of yordim since 1948 is about 350,000 of which 200,000 are in the United States, and 90 percent of whom are Jews. The Bureau bases its figure on an analysis of the data compiled at Ben-Gurion International Airport and Israel's other ports of entry and departure.(4)

The Bureau's figures stand in sharp contrast to those bandied about by other sources. Shmuel Lahis claims that there are 700,000 yordim and argues that his figures are based upon reports made by the Israel consulates in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. In 1980, they issued a figure of 500,000, but, Lahis claims, with the increase of yordim today, there are some 200,000 more.(5) Dr. Asher Friedman, former coordinator of activities to prevent yerida at the Prime Minister's office, maintains that there are currently between 450,000 and 500,000

yordim.(6)

More specific data is available with regard to certain categories of yordim. The Jerusalem Post indicated in August 1988 that hundreds of discharged IDF officers, including 171 of high rank, had emigrated in the previous few years.(7) Figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that 14-18 percent of Israelis with United States-issued green cards are declared scientists and engineers with graduate degrees. According to the same report, there are 34,000 Israelis with green cards who are declared scientists, professionals, academics and various types of technicians. Out of the 34,000, between 1,250 and 1,600 are university professors.(8)

According to Arie Paltiel, head of the Department of Migration at the Central Bureau of Statistics, CBS has a more definite count of the number of yordim than any other source. The Bureau measures the actual time Israelis spend abroad by calculating the difference between the time they leave and enter the country. This method has several problems. One, Israelis serving or studying abroad often remain in a particular country for several years without intending to emigrate, and thus are incorrectly counted as yordim. Two, many Israelis who have indeed emigrated, but visit Israel at regular intervals of less than a year, are not counted as yordim by this method.(9)

Concerned that the latter of the two problems seriously warped their statistics, since 1984 the Bureau has been attempting to calculate the cumulative time residents spend abroad, regardless of the number of times they have re-entered the country. Paltiel said that according to statistics due to be published within the next three months, there is no significant difference between the two different methods. He added that CBS's statistics cannot be too off target, as many individuals such as Lahis charge, because they coincide with the results of all Israeli censuses. For example, when comparing CBS's numbers with those of the 1983 census, there is a marginal difference of 40,000.(10)

Although it is impossible to account for every situation, the combination of these two methods has produced a reasonably accurate set of figures, as follows:

Residents Who Have Been Abroad For Specified Continuous Periods:(11)

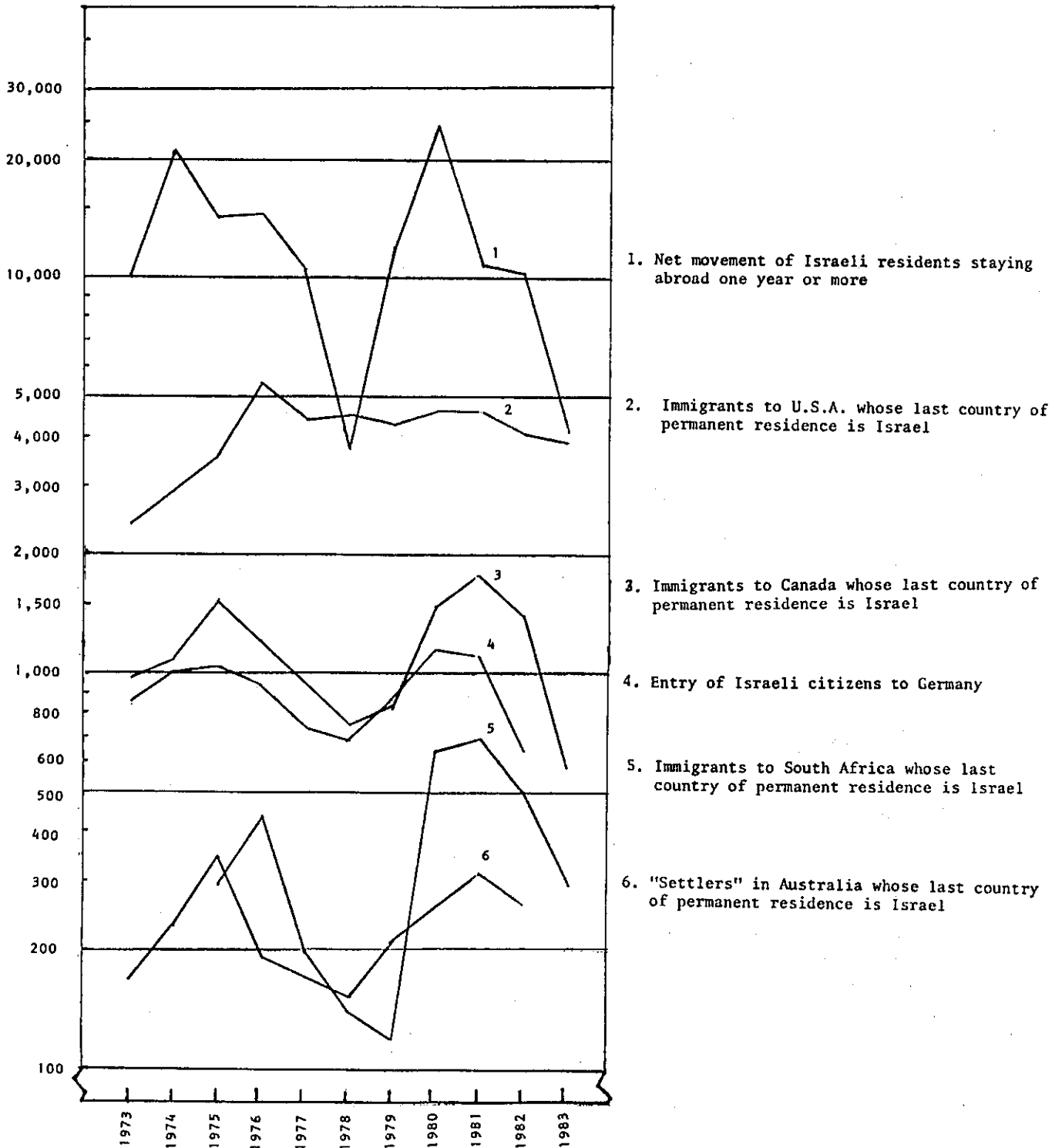
	Over 2 years	Over 1 year
1985	12,200	15,300
1986	10,300	13,900
1987	13,300	9,000

These figures suggest that there are approximately 12,500 yordim annually. On the other hand, in 1988 alone there were 15,400 persons designated as yordim by CBS. The emigration figures do not include people who were born to emigrants abroad, as well as those who came to Israel as temporary residents and left before they became citizens.(12)

In order to test the validity of this data, we turned to the foreign embassies and consulates of those countries known as principal destinations of yordim in an effort to obtain information on immigration permits granted to Israelis. The United States Consulate in Jerusalem was the only consulate/embassy in Israel willing to provide statistics on Israeli citizens from Jerusalem and Palestinian residents of Judea and Samaria who received immigration visas. Public Affairs Officer Gilbert Sherman quoted the following figures for the past four years: 1986 - 288; 1987 - 309; 1988 - 279; 1989 (through August) - 215. Two points should be noted about these figures. One is that they include Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. Two, there is almost no change from year to year.(13)

In 1986, CBS compared their statistics to statistics compiled in the U.S., Canada, Germany, South Africa and Australia on immigrants whose last country of permanent residence is Israel. As indicated by the graphs below, CBS's rate for the departure of Israelis coincides with every country except for the United States. Paltiel explained that the reason the graph

DEPARTURE OF ISRAELI RESIDENTS FROM ISRAEL  
AND ENTRY OF ISRAELI IMMIGRANTS  
TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES (15)



from the U.S. does not reflect the Bureau's graph is because, unlike the graphs of the other four countries, it was calculated according to the number of Israelis who received green cards and not the number of Israelis who entered the country on visas. Paltiel recently calculated and graphed the number of Israelis who entered the U.S. on visas and found that it did indeed coincide with the other graphs (the graph is due to be published within the next three months).(14)

### Why Do People Leave?

There are many reasons for yerida. First, says Shmuel Lahis, "economics are a powerful ingredient." Most Israelis who leave the country are males between the ages of 24 and 35 who feel they have very little opportunity for success in Israel. Many have just completed their regular army service and have no profession. Others have completed six-month job training courses and then cannot find jobs. Many go abroad as tourists. When their money supply diminishes they look for jobs and often end up doing work that they would never think of doing in Israel. As time passes, it gets harder and harder to return to Israel, especially for those who have no profession. A great number marry locals, become citizens, and have children who assimilate and often have no Jewish education. As a result, Israel's potential population is somewhat decreased.(16)

Much the same is true of graduates in the professions. There are some 34,000 professionals with second and third degrees who are jobless since there are not enough openings for people of these ranks. Recently qualified academics suffer from lack of opportunities in Israel due to budget cutbacks at universities.(17) Colonel (res.) Eli Geva stated that army officers unable to find jobs they felt they deserved were discouraged and eager to go abroad. Others feel an urge to go abroad "for fresh air." They roam around the world and when they run out of money find odd jobs and stay there. Other emigrants include

families and those desiring a more comfortable lifestyle. In some cases, people otherwise established simply get restless and leave to look for new horizons.

While it remains difficult to get accurate figures as to the number of yordim, it seems clear that the number is less than the headlines would have us believe. Moreover, the whole issue of Israelis leaving Israel must be seen in light of new patterns of mobility and residence that are developing the world over. The appropriate policy response to yerida will undoubtedly have to be reassessed. In essence, very few Israelis should be viewed as having left Israel for good or forever, and those who have made their fortunes abroad and established themselves in other countries may very well invest and establish second homes in Israel. While such people and others like them must be differentiated from Israelis who stay at home, pay their taxes, do their military service, and assume all the burdens as well as the pleasures of living in Israel, they, too, need to be considered in the balance and the calculus of Jewish life and the future of Israel.

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### Notes

1. "Indicators for the Number of Israeli Residents Abroad," (Jerusalem: Department of Demography, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1988).
2. Interview with lawyer Shmuel Lahis (November 1989).
3. Lea Levavi, "Youth Movement Graduates Organizing to Fight Yerida," Jerusalem Post (April 27, 1987).
4. Carl Schrag, "Israelis Leaving Israel," Israel Scene (June 1987).
5. Interview with Shmuel Lahis.
6. Gidon Elon, "Treatment of Yerida is a Failure," Ha'aretz (March 9, 1989).
7. "Hundreds of Former IDF Officers have Left Israel for Good," Jerusalem Post (August 25, 1987).

8. Bernard Josephs, "Statistics Show a Brain Drain," Jerusalem Post (March 2, 1988).
9. Ephraim Achiyram, Nira Dantzinger, and Jaquelin Liebman, "Development of High Tech Industries, Knowledge, and Bringing Back Scientists," (Jerusalem: National Council for Science and Development, October 1984).
10. Interview with Arie Paltiel, Head of the Department of Migration, Central Bureau of Statistics (December 1989).
11. "Movement of Immigration and Tourism," Statistical Abstract of Israel (Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1989).
12. "A Zionist Government is Needed," Ha'aretz (August 2, 1989).
13. Interview with Gilbert Sherman, Public Affairs Officer, American Consulate, Jerusalem (November 1989).
14. Interview with Arie Paltiel.
15. "Migration of Israelis Abroad: A Selected Survey of Official Data from Selected Countries," Reprint from the Supplement to the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, No. 6 (Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1986).
16. Dan Izenberg, "Down - and Truly Out," Jerusalem Post (July 20, 1989).
17. Shmuel Lahis, "Report on Israelis in the U.S.A." (Jerusalem: Jewish Agency For Israel, 1980).

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